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COMMITTEES  
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INDIAN AFFAIRS

## United States Senate

November 10, 2016

The Honorable Bruce Loudermilk  
Director  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
MS-4606-MIB  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Loudermilk:

I write expressing concern regarding the length of time it takes for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to approve agricultural leases on Montana Indian reservations. Montana tribal members rely heavily on their rich land resources for much-needed financial revenue and the elongated process under 25 CFR 162 hampers potential for stronger agricultural economies in Native communities. Montana is home to 1,787 American Indian agricultural operators cultivating 5,111,311 acres of farm land. Montana's tribal economies depend on this sector to support their day-to-day operations and the services tribal governments provide to their members. For some Montana reservations, agriculture is the primary source of employment. This is why it is critical that the BIA work with Montana tribes to approve leases in a timely manner.

In a recent StrikeForce Town Hall meeting hosted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), my office heard firsthand from Native Americans in Montana about the challenges they face as a result of a slow lease-approval process, concerns which have also been echoed by at least one tribal agriculture organization in the state. I have heard that it can take up to eight months to approve a lease, resulting in lost or delayed revenue. This is unacceptable. I urge you to prioritize staff and budgetary resources such that these leases are approved in a reasonable amount of time in order to prevent further missed economic opportunity for Montana's tribal communities.

The Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC), based in Billings, MT, put it well: "Land-based agricultural resources are vital to the economic and social welfare of many Native American and Alaskan Tribes. The harmonies of man, soil, water, air, vegetation and wildlife that collectively make-up the American Indian agriculture community, influence our emotional and spiritual well being." As part of the government-to-government trust relationship between the United States and Native nations, it is critical that the BIA fulfill its responsibilities in tribes' pursuit of self-sufficiency and economic prosperity.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES

United States Senator